Back to turmoil: refugee and IDP return to and within South Sudan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This *Working Paper*[1] investigates the challenges South Sudanese returnees and displaced persons face from their very own perspective. Building on field research in the autumn and winter of 2015 , it analyses the patterns of return and coping strategies of returnees, as well as any assistance that aid agencies can provide. The findings indicate that return is neither a simple, linear nor necessarily durable solution. From the viewpoint of the returnees, the main challenges of return are the lack of physical security, food, water, education and jobs. As resources in South Sudan are very scarce overall because of a collapsing economy and continued fighting, competition over resources between returnees and local communities, as well among returnees, is common. The easy access to small arms, ethnic divisions and mistrust between groups further exacerbate these tensions. The sustainability of return seems to depend largely on how well returnees can access resources at their return location and thus secure a livelihood for them and their families, which, in turn, is not only influenced by the social network and political access the returnees have but also the economic situation at the return location. Aid agencies therefore should support livelihood opportunities and early development programmes at the preferred return locations, including local communities and youth groups in their efforts, to reduce feelings of inequality between groups. Besides diversified and long-term economic development initiatives, higher education opportunities as well as psychological support must also be provided to guarantee self-sufficiency of returnees and prevent renewed displacement.

1 \ The author would like to thank all persons and organizations that assisted her in her field research and provided valuable feedback to this *Working Paper*. Particular thanks go to the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils (DRC and NRC), Laura Gerken and Elke Grawert (BICC).

CONTENTS

Main findings

Return is not necessarily a signal for peace

The voluntary return of displaced persons does not automatically start with the signing of a peace agreement. Some have already returned before that and others may still not return as fighting is still ongoing or they do not trust the peace process. Return, therefore, has no clear beginning or end. Yet, aid agencies in South Sudan are often still structured along conflict and "post-conflict" scenarios even though this does not reflect the reality on the ground. Spontaneous or early returnees in particular fall through the grid of the current aid structure that is focused mainly on emergency and that does not include relief work.

Return is a dynamic process and shows different patterns

Patterns of return in South Sudan are diverse and dynamic. Individual characteristics of the returnee, such as ethnicity, gender and age, influence the return location and its economic, social and political context. Particular return patterns are, moreover, used as coping strategies of returnees, such as splitting up family members and moving back and forth between displacement and return locations, as well as moving to locations where the returnee is part of an ethnic majority and, thus, can rely on ethnic kinship assistance. Furthermore, as return can encompass moving to a new location, it can be linked to local integration. While the majority still seems to return to rural settings, a trend towards the urbanization of returnees can be observed.

Local communities are nearly as vulnerable as returnees are

Some aid organizations and scholars assume that returnees are reintegrated and that return has been sustainable when their situation is similar to that of the local communities that receive them. Yet field research observations made in South Sudan demonstrate that similar situations of the two do not necessarily indicate that the returnees have been sustainably reintegrated so that they are not forced to flee again. In South Sudan, often the host community is impoverished, with no livelihood opportunities. While it is true that returnees might be more vulnerable as, for example, they have lost their land, they may be even better off than members of the host community because of their higher education opportunities in exile that possibly equip them with needed skills at the return location. While the situation of the two might not be identical, they can influence each other; creating competition between the two over often scarce resources, such as food, land and jobs.

Accessibility of resources crucial for sustainable return

Field research findings in the autumn and winter of 2015 indicate that besides individual characteristics and experience during displacement, the sustainability of return of an individual depends largely on the accessibility of resources and livelihood opportunities at his or her return location. These include mainly, but are not limited to, the access to food, land, jobs, markets and education. These different economic factors are interlinked; access to land or a job can influence the food security of the returnee. The access to these resources is very much dependent on the social network and political access the returnee has and aid services received at the return location.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings from field research in South Sudan and Ethiopia in the autumn and winter of 2015 as well as secondary literature, the author recommends that local and international aid organizations working in South Sudan

Include the host community in the (re)-integration process of returnees

First, the host community is not necessarily better off than the returnees and, thus, should be included in aid provisions and local livelihood activities. Otherwise, it is likely that a feeling of inequality develops and increases tensions between the two groups. Second, including the host community can help identify necessary gaps in the local markets, in resources and skills needed so that trainings and programmes can be adapted and applied accordingly, avoiding any waste of funds. As a clear differentiation between returnees and hosts is often difficult, such as in Bor, and as the needs of the two groups are often not that different, it would be advisable not to differentiate between groups, but to support the whole community instead. Greater flexibility in donors assistance and programmes would therefore be desirable.

Promote livelihood opportunities and guarantee quality and diversification

As sustainable return and reintegration seems to largely depend on the livelihood opportunities at the return location, aid agencies should attempt to make sure that resources are accessible. This includes long-term approaches, resulting in multi-year commitments (OCHA et al., 2016) until returnees have become self-sufficient. Aid agencies must finally learn from the past that neglecting locations, such as Aweil, through short-term approaches can lead to new "crisis" spots. Moreover, offering diversified income opportunities (rural and urban) will make the returnees more resistant to "shocks" and has proven to help returnees overcome livelihood gaps. Furthermore, bringing in and consulting with the local government makes them assume responsibility, which can help implement programmes more effectively. To build up livelihoods, the land and seeds provided must be of a good quality, with land, for instance being close to water boreholes.

Target young people

Local livelihood programmes should, in addition, target young people and provide them with future perspectives other than violence. Young men between 18 and 35 in particular are often neglected as they are not considered "vulnerable". Yet, they can be a highly influential force "when it comes to the peace process or disrupting it—if overlooked" (Bohnet, 2016b, p. 3). Including young people also means access to higher education opportunities and adequate vocational training that, to assure quality, ought to extend beyond a few days. Salaries of teachers need to be paid, and training of teachers promoted so that quality of teaching is also guaranteed.

Be pro-active and start early development programmes

Overall, aid and local government agencies should strive to act pro-actively so that early and spontaneous returnees are not neglected. People have already returned and thus, aid agencies should act fast not to delay assistance so that these returnees are not forced to migrate again. Despite the fact that only recently, people have fled and become displaced again, it has also to be acknowledged that some displaced persons will return early despite the unstable situation. The focus of aid agencies should not only be on emergency, but also on development to address the full cycle from displacement to reintegration. It has been observed that South Sudan does not follow "clear stages" (Schomerus & Allen, 2010, p. 11) of conflict and peace, meaning that there are no clear-cut endings and beginnings between conflict and peace. As not all people can or want to return to their pre-crisis or ancestral home, local integration measures have to be fostered. Receiving information about the situation at the pre-crisis home can also help the displaced person to make more informed

decisions about their return and, therefore, information-sharing should be supported. By not having false expectations once the returnees return, grievance and frustration levels will be lower and thus, also the likelihood of resorting to violence.

Take the psychological dimension of reintegration into account

While the emphasis of sustainable return has been on the ability to establish livelihood opportunities, the psychological dimension of reintegration that relates to one's identity, the feeling of home and one's psychological well-being (Ruben et al., 2009, p. 910) should not be neglected. It has been mentioned less here and possibly in previous studies before because it is a component that is hard to measure. Yet, non-government organizations (NGOs) have repeatedly suggested that reconciliation is not possible before trauma-healing and accounting for the past has been addressed. The author's research, in Aweil, Bor and Juba, has shown that people did not want to return because they did not trust the peace process, and because of the traumatic experiences they had faced. The South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC), a council of various churches in South Sudan, has been a good example in promoting trauma-awareness and in reconciliation activities among different ethnic communities. Although stakeholders could not agree on when reconciliation can and should happen and how it is best achieved, many expressed the need for trauma-healing as a precondition for sustainable reintegration. Yet, psychiatric care is very limited (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 8).

Introduction

Five years after independence and one year after the signing of the peace deal in August 2015, South Sudan is back in turmoil. Despite the peace agreement, fighting had never really stopped, but the recent violence in Juba and Wau in July of 2016 had been particular large in scale, and the slight hope that the slow peace process would advance, has been shattered. Instead, the country is facing civil war again.

But even before these recent violent events, most aid organizations[1] and displaced persons, as well as many other stakeholders had been sceptical about the peace process in South Sudan. The constellation of power had remained the same, with Salva Kiir as president and Riek Machar as vice-president—despite the fact that both had been accused of having committed war crimes.[2] The recent replacement of Machar by Taban Deng Gai, former chief negotiator for South Sudan's armed opposition, as vice-president (Sudan Tribune, 27-07-2016) will most likely not contribute to the stability of the country either. This is confirmed by the statement made by Machar on 25 September in which he declares "war" on the "regime" and condemns the appointment of Taban Deng Gai (Sudan Tribune, 25-09-2016). It rather demonstrates the divisions within the armed opposition faction of the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in- Opposition (SPLA-IO). Mistrust within and among different groups prevails and is widespread but the divisions are much more complex than "only" between the two major ethnic groups—Dinka (Salva Kiir is from the Dinka community) versus Nuer (Riek Machar is from the Nuer community). It is not even known who started the latest violence in Juba. Different groups accuse each other. In addition, the economy is collapsing (Golla, 2016) and the level of food insecurity has reached its highest level since the start of the conflict in December 2013 (Sudan Tribune, 30-06-2016). Although South Sudan is potentially a rich country with its oil reserves and arable land, it is at the brink of national bankruptcy (Grieß, 2016).

In spite of this precarious situation, people have stayed, and some have returned even before the signing of the peace deal. Yet the majority of people remain displaced. Although precise numbers are hard to get,[3] UNHCR (2015) assumes that in 2014 around 200,000 people returned and many thousands followed before the outbreak of the recent violence that has displaced thousands again.[4]

According to UNHCR, return is one of the three durable solutions besides local integration and resettlement to a third country. Furthermore, return is often considered a "signifier for peace" (Kälin, 2008, p. 2). Yet the case of South Sudan clearly demonstrates that return is not always durable and not necessarily directly linked to peace. To be durable, it also needs to be successful and sustainable (Black & Gent, 2004).

More than twenty years ago, researchers studying refugees pointed out that return is not a "problem-free" process (Rogge, 1994, p. 14). It neither automatically means peace (Adelman, 2002; Macrae, 1999), nor is it enough to promote it (Black & Gent, 2004, p. 12). Instead, it can lead to security risks (Lischer, 2011). The question of how return can be made sustainable is badly understudied. Furthermore, no common agreement exists among social scientists on what sustainable return is actually about or how it can be measured (Gent & Black, 2005, p.1). The most common definition is that returnees are not forced to migrate again (Black & Gent, 2004, p. 15). This definition will also be used here for comparison reasons although the author acknowledges that returnees might still be mobile. Yet, the answer to how to guarantee that returnees do not have to flee again, in other words, how to make their return sustainable, is a matter of discussion between policymakers and aid organizations.

If return is not made sustainable, conflict can re-emerge, for example, between returnees and the local host community, and people might be forced to flee again (Black & Gent, 2004, p. 9), as currently seen in South Sudan. Then return does not only affect the individual but can have further consequences for the wider community where the displaced persons return to. Returnees also take the sustainability of return into consideration when assessing whether to return

1 \ The author refers to all international, national and local actors involved in aid services, be they humanitarian or development. See, also Collinson and Duffield (2013, p.1).

2 \ See African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 2014.

3 \ Returnees do not necessarily register themselves or are registered. Moreover, the distinction between returnee and displaced persons is not always clear-cut as is outlined later in the text.

4 \ UNMISS speaks of 7,000 (Sudan Tribune, 07-11-2016) while OCHA (2016a) estimates up to 36,000.

or not (Black & Gent, 2004, p. 18). Thus, to understand the assistance returnees need to make their return last is crucial.

Based on a two-and-a-half month field research in South Sudan and Ethiopia in the autumn/ winter of 2015, this *Paper* investigates the challenges and coping strategies of South Sudanese returnees and the assistance needed by aid agencies. Return became a sensitive issue shortly after the signing of the peace deal in 2015 as aid organizations interviewed feared that if one talked about return, donors would assume that there are no more emergencies. In view of the recent outbreak of violence, return of displaced persons seems currently also not viable (Sudan Tribune, 04-06-2016). Still, people have returned before and others will return again despite the grim situation. As the case of South Sudan shows, neither conflicts nor displacements have clear cut beginnings or ends. The aid structure therefore has to be adapted to this fact rather than following a linear structure. This *Paper* thus argues that besides providing emergency relief, aid agencies have to develop pro-active development initiatives to make the return of displaced persons sustainable, particular in conflict settings such as in South Sudan.

Although Collinson & Duffield (2013) had already pointed out the specificities and challenges of aid in conflict settings, they did not explicitly address the issue of return. Even despite more extensive research on return in the last decades (Bakewell, 1999; Black & Koser, 1999; Long, 2013), studies have mostly been restricted to legal aspects (Bradley, 2013) or centred around the conditions for the decision to and the process of return (Hammond, 2014). Those that have focused more on the question of sustainable return have been limited to the European context and to refugees exclusively (see, for example: Black, 2002). This *Paper* goes beyond the return of refugees by including the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As IDPs often represent the largest bulk of displaced persons, it is essential not to ignore them in the return process. As the IDP settlements in South Sudan are not considered to be a sustainable solution (Arensen, 2016), the question is how their return can be made sustainable and how a durable solution can be found.

While much research has been done on previous return movements to South Sudan, less has been put forward in regard to the recent returns since December 2013. This *Paper* takes previous and current return movements into account, compares them and draws lessons from them. Although the focus is on return, the author clearly states that she does not wish to favour involuntary return but rather intents to make donors and aid organizations alike aware of the challenges to return and stay. Uniquely, she describes these challenges from the perspective of displaced persons and previous returnees themselves as their views until now have largely been ignored in the study of sustainable return (Bohnet, Mielke, Rudolf, Schetter, & Vollmer, 2015). While the term 'sustainability' has mainly been used in development debates and was originally coined in studies relating to ecology, it has also been put in relation to an array of terms (Baker, 2006, p. 7), amongst them return (see, for example: Black & Gent, 2004). Yet, what it encompasses is debated. This *Paper* tries to provide some insights in the issue of sustainable return in the context of South Sudan and how it could be supported by aid agencies, knowing well that sustainability is dynamic and not about reaching an end state (Baker, 2006, p.7).

The *Paper* starts with an introduction to the methodology used and then gives a short overview of the context of displacement and return dynamics in South Sudan. It follows with a description of the observations made during the field research, including interview extracts and views of displaced persons and local communities. The author then analyses the findings, depicting patterns and components of sustainable return to and within South Sudan, as well as the livelihood situation of returnees and the challenges of sustainable return. The results show that sustainability of return largely depends on the access of resources at the return location. These are dependent on the skill levels of the returnees and aid services delivered to them, but also on the returnee's social networks, family and ethnic ties and political inclusion levels. Return is not just a technical issue where aid can "fix" everything, but rather a very "highly politically charged process" (Gent & Black, 2005, p.1). Therefore, all involved need to bear in mind that understanding the challenges of return might be helpful for aid organizations and policymakers alike.

Methodology

To investigate the challenges of return displaced South Sudanese and returnees are facing, the author conducted a small N-study (i.e. a study of a few cases), a two-month field research at three different locations: Aweil, Bor and Juba (see following map) within South Sudan from early October to the end of November 2015. These three locations are the main cities in each of the states and were chosen because they represent different waves of return.[5]

Aweil saw one of the largest waves of organized and spontaneous returnees from Northern Sudan after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005 and after the independence of South Sudan in 2011. It therefore represents an older case of return. While Aweil has until recently been quite unaffected by the conflict in December 2013, the other two field locations, Bor and Juba present more recent cases of return as they have been at the centre of the conflict (African Union Commission of Inquiry on South Sudan, 2014). Until the autumn of 2015 return to both these places was mainly spontaneous. In addition, although exact numbers are hard to get, there seemed to be large numbers of returnees in Bor and Juba at the time of the field research. The cities were amongst the first return locations. The situation has changed again as those who had settled there have been displaced again. Yet lessons might be learned from the previous return processes for better preparation of future return waves.

Map 1

Research sites in South Sudan and Ethiopia

5 \ The sites were chosen in close cooperation with local and international experts.

The author conducted individual semi-structured in-depth narrative interviews[6] as well as focus group discussions,[7] thus taking a qualitative approach to understand the "stories" behind the returns better. The interview partners were chosen through snowball sampling. Despite the fact that a representative sample could not be drawn because of security and feasibility reasons, the author tried to include different gender and age, as well as ethnic groups because returnees, like displaced persons, are not homogenous.[8] In addition, to have various perspectives and to verify statements, the author chose people from different walks of life: From students, to the community over church leaders and local government representatives. The author tried to reduce bias (see Jacobsen & Landau, 2003, p. 13) by starting the snowball sample from various angles, interviewing returnees as well as members of the host community to compare their situation to that of the returnees. They were both asked about their relationship with each other, as well as about their security, food and work situation. This helped identify the relation between the two groups and their effects on each other on the question of sustainable return. With the focus of the *Paper*, consequently, lying on the micro level as it analyses the situation of individual returnees and hosts, some part of it was on the meso/group-level, investigating the relation between the returnees and hosts.

While the author focused her attention during her field research on civilian returnees and not on former combatants, she experienced that the line between civilians and combatants cannot always be clearly drawn as many civilians are armed, and combatants often live with their families (Breitung, Paes, & van de Vondervoort, 2016, p.19) as some returnees interviewed stated that they had fought before.

Besides displaced persons, returnees and hosts of various gender and age groups within South Sudan, the author also interviewed South Sudanese refugees from the Nuer ethnic group[9] who lived in the camps Jewii and Tierkidi, near Gambella town in Ethiopia. The author asked them about the challenges they are facing in their return to South Sudan. Through this data, she was able to compare return dynamics and challenges of return among refugees and IDPs.

The author faced multiple challenges during the interviews: Security, accessibility and mistrust were the main ones. Due to security risks, the author could not cover all areas and was accompanied sometimes by a local guide or government official. Therefore, she was not able to randomly select locations or interview partners. People were not always able to talk freely even though the author tried to find places where they were most at ease and could speak privately. Despite the fact that the author made clear from the beginning that the interviews were voluntary, confidential and that they would not necessarily change their situation to prevent false expectations,[10] some people were reluctant to talk without being paid any money or receiving aid assistance. The gender issue, too, caused uncertainty whether men would have responded differently if they had talked to a man.

All the interviews were then triangulated by combining various perspectives. On-the-spot observations were crucial to understanding the local circumstances. These were, furthermore, framed by various expert interviews with local and international NGOs and international organizations as well as local government officials.[11] Finally, secondary literature on return, reintegration as well as on displacement and South Sudan was included and compared to the findings of the field research to see if they coincide and support each other or contradictions arise.

To draw conclusions from the literature and the additional data collected on the situation of returnees in South Sudan, the data (interviews and observations) were analysed with the impoverishment and risk model by Cernea (2000). While his model has been

6 \ Seven in Juba, eight in Aweil and seven in Bor. For most interviews, the author worked with a translator of the same gender and ethnicity as the interview partners

7 \ Two focus groups in Aweil with women and seven men and two focus groups in Juba with three men (students) and five men (leaders). In the focus group discussions and interviews with women, the author was supported by a female translator..

8 \ In Aweil, the author interviewed Dinka and Luo ethnic groups. In Bor, she interviewed Dinka from Bor, Twic East and Duk as well as Nuer. In Juba, she questioned both Dinka and Nuer as well as people from the Madi ethnic group.

9 \ Refugees in Gambella are mainly of the Nuer ethnicity.

10 \ See also Mazurana, Jacobsen, & Gale (2013) for more details on challenges of conducting research in conflict settings.

11 \ In total, 40 experts were interviewed.

developed for resettlement, it can also be applied to the reintegration of displaced persons and has also been used previously in this context (see, for example, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2010; Lukunka, 2013).

Cernea (2000) delineates eight risk factors that come with displacement and suggests ways of addressing them. He stresses social and economic components of reintegration, such as access to land, a job, shelter, social inclusion, food and health security, restoration of property, as well as rebuilding of social networks. Therefore, particularly these aspects also will be focused upon in the analysis of challenges of sustainable return. Yet while Cernea's (2000) model can be helpful to measure the reintegration level of South Sudanese returnees and indicate main risk factors of impoverishment, it implies linearity. He assumes that there has been a loss of one of the components, such as jobs or shelter and that during displacement or after, this component is restored. Yet, some displaced persons can be better off during displacement instead of after displacement. Therefore to compare the situation of returnees to before, during and after displacement and analysing the situation of an individual over time does not necessarily imply that the situation progressively gets better—it rather shows that it might have "ups and downs". The fact that a returnee finds him/herself in the same situation as before or during displacement does not necessarily mean that he is well off. Consequently, the *Paper* focuses especially on the livelihood situation of displaced persons once they returned.

Table 1

Numbers of displaced persons in protection of civilan sites (PoCs) in South Sudan

PoCs	Jan. 2016*	27 June 2016**	4 July 2016***
Wau	*202*	*219*	*219*
Bentiu	*115,014*	*97,221*	*93,817*
Melut	*664*	*700*	*700*
Malakal	*47,020*	*32,719*	*32,719*
Bor	*2,283*	*2,004*	*2,004*
Juba	*27,983*	*27,959*	*27,959*
TOTAL	*193,166*	*160,822*	*169,418*

Sources: *Arensen, 2016; **United Nations Mission in South Sudan, 2016b; ***United Nations Mission in South Sudan. 2016a

Displacement and return in the context of South Sudan

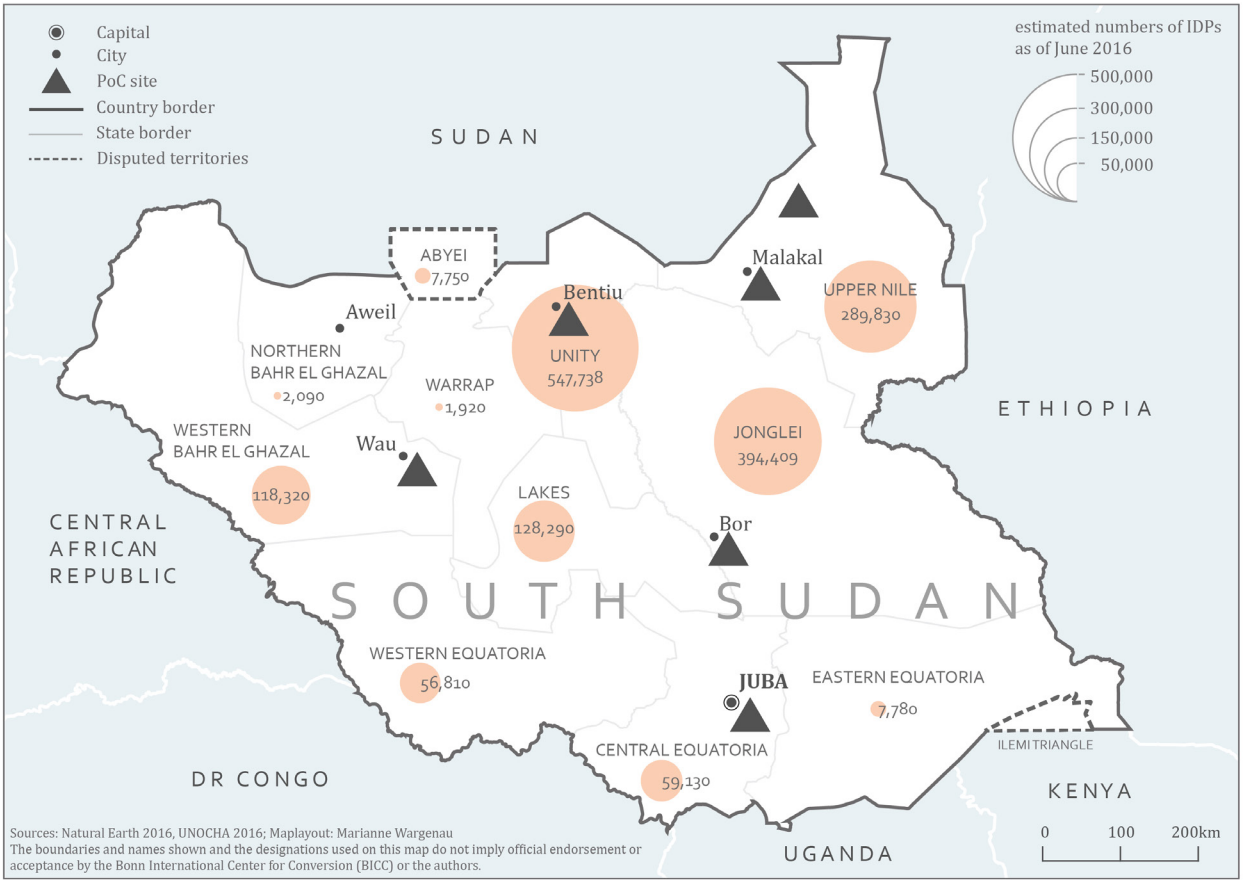
The topic of return is not new for policymakers, aid organizations and researchers in South Sudan, as the country has long and previous experience of conflict and return. "Most South Sudanese have lived through a multiplicity of episodes of war and attempts at peace building" (Pendle, 2016). Yet questions about how sustainable return can be promoted remain. In addition, recommendations of the past have often still not been put into practice because of technical difficulties, donor structures and a lack of political will. Moreover, there has been no recent move toward demobilization (International Crisis Group, 2016), and previous demobilization processes have been slow or have failed altogether (Turyamureeba, 2014).

The last major return wave had occurred after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) on 9 January 2005, which had ended the forty-year long civil war between the North and South of Sudan that had erupted because of "economic marginalization of the South and a near-exclusion of southerners from positions in the government" (Grawert, 2010, p. 1). The war had displaced more than four million people. Between 2007 and 2013, around two million people had returned. The returnees had been full of hope (United Nations Mission in Sudan, 2016). Yet their return was not sustainable as in December 2013 new conflict erupted, and people had to flee again.

What had started as a political power struggle between President Salva Kiir and Vice-President Riek Machar in December 2013 (Johnson, 2014), quickly took on an ethnical dimension as the two leaders represent two different ethnic groups that had long been rivals. This conflict, which was only one of many,[12] but one with the largest scale of fatalities, displaced more than 2.3 million people (Golla, 2016).

Map 2

Numbers of displaced persons in South Sudan by state



12 \ For the different types of conflicts in South Sudan, see Box 1.

While a peace accord was signed between Kiir and Machar in August 2015, the large majority of displaced persons has not yet returned. Around 1,7 million people remain internally displaced, and over 600,000 displaced in the neighbouring countries: Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2016b). The renewed large-scale violence in Juba has furthermore displaced returnees and hosts.

Persons who have been displaced within South Sudan live in any of the seven protection of civilian sites (PoCs) as the internally displaced (IDP) camps in South Sudan are called or in spontaneous settlements throughout the country. Two PoCs are located in Juba and the others in Wau, Bor, Bentiu, Melut and Malakal. The majority of IDPs, however, live outside the PoCs. The Protection Cluster South Sudan (2016) estimates that 1.69 million people were displaced outside of the PoCs in contrast to 188,184 within PoCs by 31 March 2016. The majority of South Sudanese refugees can be found in Gambella, Ethiopia

Despite the Peace Agreement, fighting between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and SPLA-IO (in opposition) had continued, albeit on a smaller scale until July 2016, namely in Western Bahr el Ghazal and Unity (Protection Cluster South Sudan, 2016, p. 2). In addition, inter-communal fighting, such as in Jonglei, has also caused displacement, although the situation since 2014 has been "slowly recovering" (Johnson, Thomas, Mozersky, & Marekia, 2016, p.13). In January 2014, Bor was still a "ghost town" as everyone had fled the city, but since March 2014, people have started to return. Before the renewed violence in July 2016 IDPs also left spontaneously from the PoCs in Bentiu, Bor and Juba to where the security situation had recently improved (Protection Cluster South Sudan, 2016, p. 2). As can be seen in Table 1, from January to July 2016 the numbers of displaced persons in some of the PoCs fell. Returns from Juba to Upper Nile, organized by the government, have also taken place. Yet, the very recent violence makes return of displaced persons a challenging endeavour and seems far from a durable solution. Yet, what are and have been the challenges to return, particularly from the perspectives of the displaced and returnees themselves?

Box 1
South Sudan's many conflicts

It is neigh on impossible to provide an overview of all conflicting parties and conflicts here; yet this Box attempts to provide a short overview of some of the main players mentioned in the context of the field research. It is too simplistic to describe the conflict dynamics since December 2013 in binary terms, such as Kiir versus Machar or Dinka versus Nuer. The reality "... is [instead] a complicated web of competing interests and alliances that shift according to the perceived interests of those involved" (Johnson et al., 2016, p.4) and include many more layers and fractions, even inside the SPLA-IO (Young, 2015). They cannot always be clearly separated, but are rather interlinked respectively built on one another and involve often different types of (ethnic and demographic) groups, as well as different locations within South Sudan:

***Shilluk, Dinka and Nuer** tensions are predominately prevalent near Malakal in Upper Nile state, the "oil producing border area" (Schomerus & Allen, 2010, p. 17). The decree of October 2015 by Salva Kiir to divide South Sudan's ten states into 28 has led to particular resentment among the Shilluk against the Dinka (Human Security Baseline Assessment, 2016, p. 1) as the decree will split their "kingdom" and in all likelihood reduce their power status in the area.*

***Murle** of Pibor county in Jonglei state have a "history of hostile relations with Dinka, Lou Nuer and Anuak" (Johnson, 2014, p. 305). Besides the Dinka and Nuer, the Murle are the most politically, economically and socially marginalized (Leff, 2012, p. 6) in Jonglei, a fact that has led to frustration among them and to violence against the other two groups. Competition often arises over land and cattle.*

***Cattle raids** are often carried out by young men (of all ethnicities) based at cattle camps. The reasons are diverse, but range from the uneven distribution of wealth, inflation of bride-price [...] and the proliferation of arms" (Schomerus & Allen, 2010, p. 9). It has even become a "survival strategy" (Schomerus & Allen, 2010, p. 17).*

***Conflict over access to land** has been one of the main "triggers of local violence" (Schomerus & Allen, 2010, p. 53). Clashes have been recorded between hosts and IDPs, as well as between returnees and hosts and different types of ethnic groups as outlined above. Tensions over other resources such as water and food have also been recorded. They take place on the micro level, but could have repercussions on a wider level.*

Risks and challenges to sustainable return: Voices from the field

In the interviews, displaced persons in Ethiopia and South Sudan, as well as returnees in South Sudan and host communities in both countries, mentioned six major challenges to return: lack of physical security, lack of food and water, difficult or no access to land and property, the difficulty of generating an income, insufficient schooling and, finally, marginalization. While this priority list of challenges might not be the same for all interviewed and not be representative of all South Sudanese, the interviewees repeatedly pointed to these as the main risk factors for their return and when they had returned.

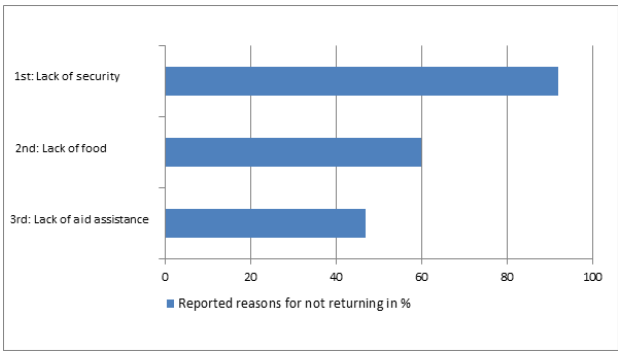
Physical security

The first and major challenge to return for South Sudanese refugees interviewed in Gambella internally displaced (IDPs) in Bor and Juba, has been the lack of security13 at their preferred return location. The return location could be the pre-crisis or ancestral or another new location where they had not lived before. Strictly speaking, "return" would not cover the latter, but it is the intention of the author to underline here that return movements are not necessarily about moving "back", but also about movements to a new location. This is why they are included here in the analysis of the return process. All interviewees regardless of ethnicity, gender or age group mentioned lack of physical security as the main obstacle to return.

The *return intention survey* conducted by the REACH Initiative (REACH, 2015a), which took a random sample of households in each of the seven PoCs in the autumn/winter of 2015 also showed that the lack of security was the main reason for not returning, thus underlining the author's findings (see Figure 1). The results for the other PoCs are similar. In the *REACH intention survey*, security refers to "the absence of fighting".

Figure 1

Main reasons why displaced persons in Juba do not return



Source: REACH, 2015b (modified figure)

Overall, the author identified four different return schemes in reaction to the lack of physical security.

\ *Displaced who wish to return but do not trust the peace process.* With the independence of South Sudan, returnees at that time had high hopes of an improvement and change of the situation, but four years later, most of them were disillusioned as they saw that nothing had changed. In some cases, the security and economic situation even got worse. South Sudanese refugees at Jewii camp in Ethiopia, for example, reported that although they had heard that a peace deal was signed in August 2015, they also apprehended that fighting is still going on. Displaced persons, interviewed in Jewii, Juba and Bor, stated that they were thus "confused" and wondered why the International Community does not put more pressure on the leaders to step down. Although they wanted to return, they did not trust the fragile peace, particularly because they had experienced before that a peace agreement alone does not guarantee peace. A 30 year old South Sudanese Nuer in Jewii camp even stated that he will never go back again because of what he had previously experienced and because he sees no future back in South Sudan.

13 \ Security here is defined as the physical or human security of the individual.

- *Displaced persons in Gambella who wish to return when the security situation improves because they feel "not at home", "isolated", "treated [only] as refugees", "cannot do things on their own" in Ethiopia.* Those who had already returned to South Sudan also stated that the reason for their return was that the host country felt "foreign" to them. They rather wanted to live in their "own land," which also meant more "freedom" for them. Some stated that they had returned because others returned as well. A 19 year old girl in Tierkidi camp, for example, indicated that she would return when everyone else returns. She assumed it would be safe to return then. For her, too, security was paramount. Yet an elderly man interviewed in Gambella said that even if the security situation improved, he would not be able to return again because of his health.
- *Displaced who in their perception have made it to the half-way point of their return;* they have not yet reached their preferred return location but have already moved away from the host location. The returnees originating from Duk and Twic East within Bor town explained in November 2015, for example, that the lack of security prevents them from returning fully back to their home county of Duk and Twic East. A 31 year-old man from Twic East commented that within Bor town he felt safe but not outside the town. Insecurity prevails. Roads in general in South Sudan have not been safe (Logistics Cluster, 2016) in South Sudan. The Logistics Cluster (2016) access constraints map also shows that in Jonglei state road warnings are in force, and the majority of roads have been closed. One of the major fears by the Dinka returnees in Bor was that of attacks by the Murle ethnic group in Jonglei (see also Box 1 on South Sudan's many conflicts above). Because of a general fear of insecurity, many returnees have also settled near the "dock site" near the river in Bor so that they can quickly cross it again if they need to.
- *Displaced who have returned to Juba and Bor conveyed that they still felt insecure and were faced with threats to their security,* such as harassments, intimidations, crime, unlawful detention and death. Returnees and displaced people felt especially insecure because of the widespread impunity they witness every day. This worry, however, was not only expressed by the returnees but also by the host population interviewed. A man from the Madi ethnic group in Juba explained, for example, about how people in his community were robbed and attacked with weapons over and over again by the same people. He could clearly identify them and they had been arrested by the police, yet they were released again after only a few days. He believes that they were released because of police corruption. Because of these instances, other returnees, such as youth leaders, reported that to protect themselves their communities have built up their own protection service.

Thus, displaced persons, returnees and those half way there expressed that their main obstacle to sustainable return has been the lack of security and their lack of trust in the peace process. However, the different return schemes in regard to security also show that feeling safe is an individual parameter. For example, two living in the same area in Juba of the same ethnic group and gender had very different perceptions of the security situation and their safety. Still, despite different opinions about the security situation, the majority of returnees expressed that besides security, food and water insecurity were the main challenges for them upon their return.

Water and food

Returnees to Aweil, Bor and Juba experienced water and food shortages, which, besides security, was the greatest challenge for them.

In Aweil, for example, a returnee named his "major enemy: Hunger", especially as drought also announced itself in that area. Other returnees in Aweil repeated that rain was not sufficient and that they coped with

water and rain shortage. NGOs working in this area also confirmed that Aweil had one of the highest malnutrition rates in the country. The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (2016b) pointed out that the nutrition situation in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, where Aweil is located, has deteriorated dramatically; from stressed to crisis classification. Not only returnees but also the host population encountered this precarious situation in Aweil, leading to violent tensions between them. As someone from the host community stated: "We are all fighting hunger".

When people returned in large numbers in 2011 after independence, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) had an additional water borehole drilled in Aweil, which reduced conflict between the host community and returnees. Yet, two boreholes were still not enough to address the water shortage in the area. Therefore, several host and returnee women recounted regularly erupting fights while sourcing water.

Women and men from the host and returnee population go to the forest or bush nearby to find whatever food is available to survive, but what they find does not fulfil their basic needs. Some also collect or chop firewood to sell it at the local market to then use the money to buy food. Generally, returnees stated in a focus group discussion that they felt left alone by service providers. When they returned in 2011 most of them had received aid for three months, which did not suffice to obtain self-sufficiency.

But not only in Aweil did returnees face food insecurity; also in Bor. A 32 year old Dinka female returnee stated that there was hunger. The community leader of Bor town emphasized as well that shortage of water is the main concern in Bor among community members. The returnees in Bor who had lost everything during the conflict in December 2013 and had no family members who could support them were reliant on food aid. Yet the single half-ration of food that was distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP) in cooperation with the local Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) of the government and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), supposed to last for two weeks, was not enough to alleviate the hunger of the returnees. One elderly man explained that he begs other returnees to give him additional food. As most aid agencies currently still operate in emergency mode, the needs of spontaneous returnees in Bor, they feel, have been overlooked.[14]

Those interviewed from Duk and Twic East in Bor, moreover, stated that they would rather stay in Bor for now than return to their home counties as there were even less livelihood opportunities than in Bor and food was even scarcer.

According to NGOs and returnees in Bor, as a coping strategy, many still go to the food distribution centre in the displaced settlement in Mingkaman near Bor town where they are still registered and where more food is distributed than in Bor for the returnees. The situation is that volatile that violent hostilities have erupted between them and the host community in Mingkaman as the host community not only felt they had to compete for resources with them but also that they were unequally treated by the aid providers in Mingkaman. Yet, returnees were not only in competition with hosts but also with displaced persons.

As a result, food insecurity of returnees and hosts seem to affect the sustainability of return and of peace in Bor and Aweil. Returnees and host communities alike are reliant on food aid and cannot currently sustain themselves on their own.

Access to land and property

Ownership of and access to land is another major challenge to sustainable return that was mentioned and experienced by interviewed displaced persons, returnees and hosts. Both can lead to conflicts between returnees and hosts and among returnees themselves. Tensions evolve around occupied property and the

14 \ Food and water insecurity also affected the health of the returnees and thus the sustainability of return. Health threats besides malnutrition have been malaria and cholera. MSF notes that malaria cases in South Sudan skyrocketed in the autumn of 2015. According to the United Nations Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 1.6 million malaria cases have been reported (Nguyen, 2016). The distance to the nearest doctor or hospital, the financial burden of treatment and the lack of medicine at the health facilities themselves were the main challenges not only for returnees, but also for hosts.

access to land for housing and farming. Returnees often "started from zero" when they returned as their houses were destroyed and land has been lost. If not supported by a relative, returnees face difficulties in accessing land. Those difficulties are related to 1) land titles and ownership, 2) violent appropriation, 3) soil quality. Sometimes relatives have sold the land of the returnee while those were in exile. A woman in Aweil recounted that her son-in-law had done this. Although neighbours could serve as witnesses and could help in disputes over land, without proper documentation and proof, property and land issues are not easily resolved. Moreover, returnees often have no money to pay lawyers and to go to court.

After independence, like in the first return wave after the CPA, tensions around access of land were common (Pantuliano, Buchanan-Smith, & Murphy, 2007; Harild, Christensen, & Zetter, 2015, p. xii). Nuer returnees in Juba were hesitant to open a court case, even if they had the money, fearing revenge by Dinka who occupied their houses. In Bor, returning Dinka learned that Ugandan troops had taken over their houses, which also led to tensions between occupant and returnee.

Tensions also emerged because of increased competition between returnees and host communities over good quality of land. Returnees in Aweil were given land upon their return, yet the quality of land was poor as it was that prone to flooding that they had to relocate again. The land they settled on was then demarcated by the Ministry of Physical Infrastructure, which forbade them to cultivate the land and to grow crops. In the end, they were able to grow okra, sorghum and groundnuts on land that was a three-hour walk away from where they lived and where there was no well. This contributed to the fact that they were not able to sustain themselves from their crops.

Generating an income

Most South Sudanese, including most returnees, have been living in rural areas. Yet upon their return, many returnees prefer to live in urban areas. Overall urbanization has increased among South Sudanese (Pantuliano, Assal, Elnaiem, McElhinney, & Schwab, 2011). Because displaced persons had lived in urban settings such as Khartoum or Kakuma[15] during their exile, they are now more accustomed to an urban life style than a rural one. According to the author's field research, returnees in all three sites, Juba, Bor and Aweil, saw more income-generating opportunities within the city than outside. Returnees furthermore complained about the lack of markets in rural areas where they could sell products or start businesses.

Yet even in urban centres, transport in general has been a challenge. No public transport is available. In Juba the "boda boda" system—motorcyclists who can take one or two persons on the back of their motorcycle—used to be a cheap alternative to walking around. However due to the recent fuel shortages and high prices (Hoth Mai, Ting Mayai, & Tiitmamer, 2016) returnees and hosts alike can hardly afford this means of transportation. Transport is not only important to get individuals to the market, but also to transport products that, like firewood, are too heavy to carry.

Returnees and hosts in Aweil could only walk to the markets or hope to be able to borrow the bike that one of their community members had received from an NGO. Pushcarts were also used if available. Thus, returnees who lived very close to markets within the city faced fewer difficulties in generating an income than those who lived further away.

This very move of returnees to urban areas has led to hostilities between the urban host community and newly arrived returnees because of competition over the few available income-generating activities. This had already been recorded in previous return movements after independence (Atari, Abdelnour, McKague, & Wager, 2009, p. 8; Haneef, 2013). Even the village saving loan system that enabled individuals to improve their financial situation with or without help from local NGOs led to conflicts that erupted over distribution of profit. Generating sustainable income generally was a major challenge in achieving sustainable return for those interviewed.

15 \ Although Kakuma is a camp, it has taken on urban like characteristic after having been in place over years.

Box 2

Oil—The resource paradox in South Sudan

Although South Sudan is rich in oil, fuel prices have skyrocketed (Hoth Mai et al., 2016). According to the World Bank (2016), South Sudan is the most oil-dependent country in the world. Yet because of "inadequate downstream infrastructure, management gaps, reduced hard currency earnings and high taxes and import duties among others" (Hoth Mai et al., 2016, p.2) coupled with global low oil prices, South Sudan has repeatedly faced fuel crises. The political disputes with Sudan and recent conflicts within South Sudan, particularly in Upper Nile, have exacerbated the situation (Hoth Mai et al., 2016).

There is a general lack of employment opportunities for returnees and hosts in South Sudan. During focus group discussions, young men complained that they were frustrated at not finding any employment and to "just sitting around." Even those who did find employment said the salary was not high enough to sustain them or their family. The high prices because of the current fiscal crisis made their salaries even less valuable. In December 2015, the inflation rate was at 110 per cent (Enough Project, 2016, p. 1).

In addition, some income-generating activities were preferred over others, which led to competition over these jobs. For instance, returnees and hosts indicated a preference for jobs at the United Nations, at an international NGO, or a "white-collar job" in "offices" such as with the government. They preferred those over, for example, service provider jobs, as the former are the most highly paid and respectable jobs in their regard, although the government has lately not been able to pay the salaries of their employed either.

Interviewees state that the chances of finding a job within the government have not been equal for all ethnic groups. The government has been very Dinka dominated and Nuer, for example, did not always have the same employment opportunities as Dinka had. Some Nuer also feared to take up a job within the government even if they could. Nuer returnees, who had had a job with the government before the outbreak of conflict in December 2013, stated that they were scared to return to their governmental position because of harassment and death threats.

In addition, returnees were not able to send money to their wives and children who had stayed in camps in neighbouring countries, such as Uganda or Kenya because of the high costs of living and a shortage of hard currency (Hoth Mai et al., 2016). A wife of a Dinka returnee in Juba, for example, was forced to return to Juba because her husband was not able to send her dollars to pay for treatment in a hospital in Uganda. Yet she would have preferred to stay in Uganda as she felt that the situation in Juba was too dangerous for her. Her husband and his friends were also concerned about security risks, yet they underlined that they would stay on as, contrary to their wives, they were "adult men" and had to support their families. But they also stated that if the security and economic situation did not improve, they would try to migrate to Australia or some other country where they would find more opportunities to find employment.

Schooling and training

Another major challenge for generating income for returnees was the lack of skills. Although returnees in exile had to some part acquired relevant schooling and trainings at their host location, these skills were not always transferrable or needed at the return location. Others did not even have the opportunity to receive schooling or training at their host location. This was particularly true for IDPs outside the PoCs. The illiteracy rate in South Sudan is one of the highest in the world (UNICEF, 2016). Some international organizations also regretted that because of this they could not hire South Sudanese employees. Returnees from within South Sudan partly lacked the skills that were needed at the local return market. Returnees from abroad instead often brought more skills with them than those that had stayed behind. Opportunities for schooling or trainings in Uganda, Ethiopia or Kenya were higher than in South Sudan. This led to rivalries for jobs between host and returnees.

This is partly due the lack in infrastructure, with marginal opportunities for higher education for returnees and hosts. Either no secondary or tertiary school was nearby or the money was not available to

pay for further education. Generally, returnees also mentioned the shortfall of scholarship programmes. In addition, returnees and hosts complained about the lack of teachers and qualified staff. As teachers often worked on a voluntarily basis as salaries were not paid by the government, teachers missed classes or were not "very motivated" in their work. Government spending has been 'redirected' from education to the military (Enough Project, 2016; Paes, 2014). Yet, women complained about even more basic obstacles to attending classes, such as the lack of latrines for women at the education facilities.

While aid organizations have provided primary education as well as vocational trainings to the displaced and to host communities, recent returnees are not included in their programmes. In addition, a number of shortcomings of those trainings have been observed. First, trainings have been very short, restricted to a few days that were not always sufficient to fully apprehend the matter. Second, if training was offered by local aid providers there was sometimes disagreement over who of their community should participate in trainings or develop their skills further. Third, trainings were often restricted to one kind of activity, such as farming, that was only helpful for one season of the year, but not for another. Fourth, trainings of women for carpentry were useless as local firms did not "trust" women to do the job. Fifth, aid organizations neglected young men in their programmes. According to the author's observations this frustrated them even more as they were already marginalized by the "patriarchal cultural attitudes of the older generations-most of them in key government positions who do not value youth for the great resource they are" (Akau, 2015). Many youths see their only opportunity for sustaining themselves and their family through criminal activity. Particular around Juba, but also in Wau, criminal activity has skyrocketed recently.

Marginalization and distrust

An additional major challenge to return as well as to reintegration has been the fear of marginalization at the return location. Displaced persons from the Nuer community in particular explained that they would not return to a county where Dinka dominated or where Nuer are not represented. Before the Nuer opposition leader of the SPLA-IO, Riek Machar, does not return to Juba, they do not see themselves represented in Juba in political terms and, thus, are also not ready to return. REACH (2015a) in their return intention survey also documented that most displaced Nuer in the PoC 3 in Juba and in Bor rather preferred to return to counties where the majority are Nuer even though this might not be their pre-crisis home. Adelman (2002) already noted that minority return after the CPA was inhibited because of tensions between different ethnic groups, such as between Nuer and Dinka, as well as unequal power representation. The unilateral decision by President Salva Kiir to increase the number of states of South Sudan from 10 to 28 in the autumn of 2015 has also complicated the matter. Effects are changes in the ethnic composition of counties with new minorities feeling disadvantaged and clashing with the majority groups.

Generally, the lack of trust between Nuer and Dinka prevailed. A Dinka returnee in Juba, for example, feared that if he goes near the PoCs in Juba, "the Nuer would kill him". Another Dinka Bor also stated that for him, the only problem in Bor where "the Nuer". Nuer returnees themselves in Juba or Bor were worried to be near the respective other ethnic group. Only on Catholic Church grounds or at the university did they feel safe and would intermingle. When asked why these locations and not outside of these, they stated "it is a different world". Recent reports have shown that even the university grounds are no longer safe (Sudan Tribune, 13-06-2016).

Field research findings: Lessons to be learned

While above observations and voices from the field only represent a snapshot limited in space (three locations in South Sudan and two in Ethiopia), time (autumn of 2015) and cases, they still provide some insights into the challenges facing the sustainability of return. As return currently does not seem to be an option for many displaced persons as the security situation has rather worsened than improved, it is an opportunity for lessons learned from these results, to compare them to earlier findings and to possibly help aid agencies to address future return movements.

Before the various forms of return are discussed, the author would like to make a general remark on "return" itself. The term 'return' can be misleading as it implies a "moving back" or a "reversal " (UNHCR, 2008, p. 1). But return does not necessarily mean return to the pre-crisis or ancestral home, but can mean settling in a new location.

Return is a process

The observations of the field research in Aweil, Bor and Juba in South Sudan and within Gambella in Ethiopia underline that the voluntary return of displaced persons does not automatically start with the signing of a peace agreement. Some have already returned before that, often, they return while some fighting is still going on (Bohnet & Rudolf, 2015, p. 2; Macrae, 1999, p.1) while others may only return once fighting has stopped. It also means that not all displaced persons can and want to return, particularly as the trust in the peace process is not high among the displaced, such as in Gambella. Consequently, "peace on paper does not necessarily mean peace on the ground" (Bohnet, 2016b) and return cannot be considered as a signal for peace. Return, therefore, has no clear beginning or end.

Despite the fact that the return of displaced persons does not automatically coincide with the signing of a peace agreement, the agendas of aid agencies in South Sudan are often still structured along conflict and post-conflict scenarios. As shown above, this does not reflect reality on the ground. Spontaneous return or early returnees as observed in Bor and Juba are not foreseen in the current aid structure that is focused on emergency and not relief work. In the early stage of return, returnees are hence left alone and need to rely more on kinship assistance or own assets.

With return not being a linear process (Bailey & Harragin, 2009, p.18), one can identify different "stages". Reintegration is generally considered a major part of it. Reintegration is also considered to be a "necessary precondition" for sustainable return (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015, p. 49). The findings from the field research also demonstrate that return does not always follow the same pattern, but instead can be diverse.

Diverse patterns of return exist

The field research findings demonstrate that return does not always follow the same pattern, but rather is diverse. The following return patterns have been identified during the field research in South Sudan and Ethiopia.[16]

- *Refugees who have fled to the neighbouring countries of Ethiopia, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya* and who have returned since the beginning of 2015.[17] Returnees from further away have not been recorded as only few South Sudanese have sought asylum in Europe. In 2015, there were 50 asylum seekers in Europe, ten of whom went to Germany (Eurostat, 2016).
- *IDP returnees,* where return can mean the return of refugees and IDPs alike. Most of those who had fled during the 2013 conflict returned from within South Sudan by the autumn of 2015. Many of those who have returned to Juba had been displaced in the "bush" near the border to Uganda or in the PoCs in Juba. Others have returned to Bor from Juba or from the spontaneous IDP settlement of Mingkaman. IDPs sometimes return earlier than refugees because they can access information about their return location more easily and have a lesser distance to travel, which also reduces the cost of

16 \ As the study was restricted to four research sites, more patterns might exist.

17 \ Exact numbers are not available.

travelling. In turn, knowing about their preferred return location can also mean that they do not want to return as they know that it is still not secure. Yet, when returning, displaced persons seem to prefer to know about the situation of the return location rather than not knowing at all. Knowing what to expect makes them judge the situation at the return location more realistically.

Due to the fact that return also entails settling in new locations, it is important that one does not only speak of reintegration as part of the return process, but also of local integration.

\ The choice of the return location can be influenced by *individual characteristics of the displaced person, such as ethnicity gender and age*. Displaced Nuer from Bor, for example, stated that they did not want to return to Bor, their pre-crisis home, but preferred to settle in Ayod or Akobo because they felt safer and are not marginalized there because there they belong to the ethnic majority, while in Bor, the ethnic majority is Dinka. The *REACH intention survey* done in November 2015 (REACH, 2015a), which shows that most displaced Nuer in Bor do not want to return to their pre-crisis home, Bor, but rather to a new place, supports this observation. That individual characteristics can influence the choice of return location has also been emphasized, for example, by Black et al. (2004), Ruben, van Houte, & Davids (2009) and Cassarino (2004), although they did not took ethnicity in account. Just as the destination location of displaced persons may be influenced by ethnic ties (Rüegger & Bohnet, 2015), the findings of this field research support the notion that the same holds true for return locations. While in Juba, for instance, mainly young men have returned from the "bush" or from Uganda or Kenya, or from the PoCsite in Juba, it has been the other way around in Bor. There, mainly women have returned from the PoC. Several interviewees reasoned that in Bor, "young Nuer men" would be seen as a "threat" to the dominant presence of Dinka. Women, even though they belonged to the different ethnicity, were not considered a "threat" as it was assumed that they would not fight. This also shows that not all family members or displaced persons return at the same time.

\ *Many family members do not necessarily return together, but return at different times or remain apart.* In Juba, for example, male returnees stated that their wives and children were still in Uganda in a camp or in a village near the border as. The men found it too dangerous for the women to return (see chapter on security above). Still, the men returned as they searched for job opportunities to support their family. Nuer returnees from the PoCs in Juba stated that their wives, too, still stayed inside the PoCs as they considered it too unsafe for their family to return. In addition, some family members stayed in the neighbouring countries as it was easier to gain access to schooling. As part of the family might stay in a settlement for displaced people, returnees might thus also move back from time to time to visit their family members. Consequently, return cannot be considered as static. Harild et al. (2015) also point out that families divide themselves up before return to build a livelihood for the future return of those that have stayed behind.
Harpviken (2014) furthermore underlines that "split return" is a common strategy of return. It is used as a coping strategy to minimize risk factors.

\ *Some displaced persons are half way on their journey to the return location*, and others return back and forth. Nuer students from the University of Juba, for example, returned only to the city for the day and went back to the PoC site in the evening. But displaced persons not only moved between locations within a county or state in South Sudan but also between international borders, such as between Uganda and South Sudan. Displacement therefore cannot be understood to have "neat endings and beginnings (Johnson et al., 2016, p.8). The same is true for return as the findings from the field research

show. Other returnees have moved, for example, from the displaced persons site Mingkaman to Bor for a while but plan to return to their pre-crisis home in Duk or Twic East County. Yet, as insecurity prevailed in their home locations and neither schools or job opportunities nor markets were available at their home locations, they decided to stay in Bor until the situation at home improves. This also applied to some returnees from neighbouring countries who first stopped in Juba but eventually wanted to move back to their home county in Unity or Upper Nile state.

- A trend towards an *urbanization of returnees* can be observed, although the majority still lives in rural settings. The reasons being that returnees, because of their experience in exile, now feel more accustomed to an urban life style than a rural one and see greater job opportunities in cities.

In sum, patterns of return in South Sudan are not always the same and are not necessarily static. Return patterns can depend on the individual characteristics of the returnee, such as ethnicity, gender or age. Particular return patterns are furthermore used as coping strategies of returnees, such as splitting up family members and moving between displacement and return locations back and forth.

Host communities are in similar vulnerable circumstances as returnees

Some aid organizations and refugee scholars (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015, p. 48; UNHCR, 2004, p. 3) assume that returnees are reintegrated and that return has been sustainable when their situation is similar to that of the local communities that receive them. Yet field research observations made in South Sudan demonstrate that similar situations of the two do not necessarily indicate that the returnees have been sustainably reintegrated. In South Sudan, the host population is itself often impoverished; with no jobs and food. While it is true that returnees might be more vulnerable as, for example, they have lost their land, they may be even better off than members of the host community because of their higher education opportunities in exile that possibly equip them with needed skills at the return location.

Furthermore, the results show that the relation of the returnees to the host community can play a crucial role in their reintegration and return process. As Cernea (2000, p. 32) points out, the risks of impoverishment of the host community may not be identical to that of the returnees, but they can be related to them and result in impoverishment implications. Cernea (2000) and refugee and conflict researchers alike have argued (see, for example Bohnet, 2015; Lischer, 2005; Rüegger, 2013; Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006) that the inflow of displaced persons can increase pressure on resources and create competition over income-generating activities, which may result in conflict between displaced and hosts. This has been seen in the case of Gambella where Nuer refugees have again and again clashed with the Anuak host population. The author has observed the same at the three field research locations in South Sudan for returnees. As pointed out in chapter three, violent disputes were recorded in Aweil over access to water, in Juba over land and property and in Bor over aid services. Consequently, the relation of returnees and hosts can have a significant impact on the reintegration process of returnees and its sustainability. Violent conflict between hosts and returnees can force the returnee to flee again or force the host to flee.

Lischer (2011), examining the return of Tutsi refugees to Uganda, was one of the first who recognized that displaced persons may also constitute security risks upon return. While returnees can bring skills and knowledge with them that help the local community and economy (Ashkenazi, Farha, Isikozlu, Radeke, & Rush, 2006, p. 11), they can also create competition and tensions. In the 2016 *Peace Report*, Bohnet (2016a) already showed the conflict risks that can and have come about in relation to the return of displaced from and within South Sudan. While these tensions not necessarily escalate into large-scale violence, reports of violent attacks, gunshot injuries and deaths are not uncommon.

Resources are already scarce at the return locations in South Sudan, and the number of returnees exacerbate this situation. Grievance levels rise and with it the motivation to engage in violence to gain access to the limited resources. Although generally aid services are not far from where returnees are, aid agencies have not paid much attention to returnees to South Sudan until the autumn of 2015. In the conflict literature, the fact that pressure on resources can create higher grievance levels is well known (see, for example: Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Raleigh & Hegre, 2009) and this argument has also been supported by the refugee literature (see, for example: Bohnet, 2015; Lebson, 2010; Mogire, 2011). Tensions over resources might be more likely when returnees and hosts belong to different ethnicities, such as Dinka and Nuer, as host populations are often more receptive to those with whom they share ethnic kinship (Newland, 1993). Yet, John (2010) analyzing Sudanese returnees from Kenya to Southern Sudan finds that returnees and hosts "do not fight just because they are different culturally or otherwise" (p. 183) but to defend their scarce resources, material or non-material. Nevertheless, ethnic divides are clearly visible in South Sudan.

Yet, while divisions between returnees and hosts can be identified, the line between return and displacement in South Sudan cannot always be easily drawn as people's movements are dynamic as seen from the different patterns of return described above. For example, while in Aweil, the separation between returnees and hosts is more pronounced where returnees have been in exile over years, in Bor this separation has been not that prominent. In Bor, almost everyone is a returnee as everyone had fled from violence in the winter of 2013/2014. Only some returned earlier than others.

The distinction between returnees and hosts comes from the aid and donor structure that differentiates between these groups. Interestingly, "returnees" themselves do not actually use the word "returnee" or only started to use it after they were introduced to it by aid organizations. For example, in Aweil, a member of the Dinka ethnic group explained that in the Dinka language there is actually no expression for returnee. They rather refer to the returnees as "the people from Khartoum" or the "North".

However, while tensions between returnees and hosts can come about, disputes among returnees themselves, for example, over the service provision during the return and reintegration process in Aweil, have also been reported during the field research. Often only very few could take part in programmes, such as vocational training, some only received a shovel and others only plastic sheeting while others received both upon return. This unequal treatment of returnees led to clashes.

Unsurprisingly, the author observed competition between returnees and displaced persons in South Sudan as most aid agencies until the autumn of 2015 had concentrated their efforts on emergency aid for displaced persons, but had not included returnees in their programmes.

The findings of the field research indicate that tensions among returnees, between returnees, displaced or hosts occurred mainly due to competition over and access to resources. Therefore, the author feels confident to suggest that accessibility to resources for all groups is essential to reduce tensions and to foster sustainable return. With access to resources, livelihood opportunities increase and are more easily secured. The author therefore expects that the sustainability of return, and along with it reintegration as part of the return process, is greater if livelihood opportunities are available at the return location.

Johnson et al. (2016), who also focus on displacement in South Sudan, also observe that the general lack of opportunities create "an environment where it is easy to mobilize dissent, especially among the youth". And as young people, particularly young men, hosts or returnees, are often not included in aid programmes as they are not considered "vulnerable", it is understandable that they become disillusioned. As small arms are readily available in South Sudan, there is plenty of opportunity to mobilize, which lowers the threshold to engage in violence as also argued in the conflict literature (see, for example, Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

The context of the return location is crucial for the return process

The results of the field research show that besides individual characteristics and experience during displacement, the sustainability of return depends largely on the return location, be it ancestral, pre-crisis or a new location. This also applies to Burundi (Lukunka, 2013, p. 18).

The context of the return location is mainly about economic, social and political factors, such as access to food and employment. While there is no general agreement on the components of sustainable return (and reintegration), there seems to be a consensus among scholars (see, for example, Rogge, 1994) that economic, social and political factors at the return location are crucial for sustainable return. This seems also to be true for South Sudan.

Even though economic and social elements can play a role in the return and reintegration process, some might be more important than others for the individual. Generally, the different factors of reintegration must not be regarded as independent of each other. Instead, they influence each other and are interlinked. Reintegration is thus a "complex multidimensional process" (Ruben et al., 2009); this is why scholars also speak of mixed embeddedness instead of reintegration. But how can a returnee be embedded or sustainably reintegrated? Which factors play a more prominent and which ones play a minor role in the context of South Sudan?

The livelihood situation of South Sudanese returnees: A question of accessibility to resources

Despite diverse patterns of return, there are similar challenges to sustainable return and (re)-integration as the findings of the field research show in the chapter on Risks of and challenges to sustainable return (pp. 15 ff.). However, dependent on their experiences and the returnee location, some challenges may be more difficult than others. In the following, this study tries to identify the livelihood situation of returnees and the main challenges to sustainable return in South Sudan in the autumn and winter of 2015 by analysing and comparing the field research findings (pp. 21 ff) with previous research and Cernea's risk factors of impoverishment (2000) as laid out in the Methodology. The *Paper* measures sustainable return on the individual level; therefore, the challenges may be different for a family, household or community as the composition of individuals varies.

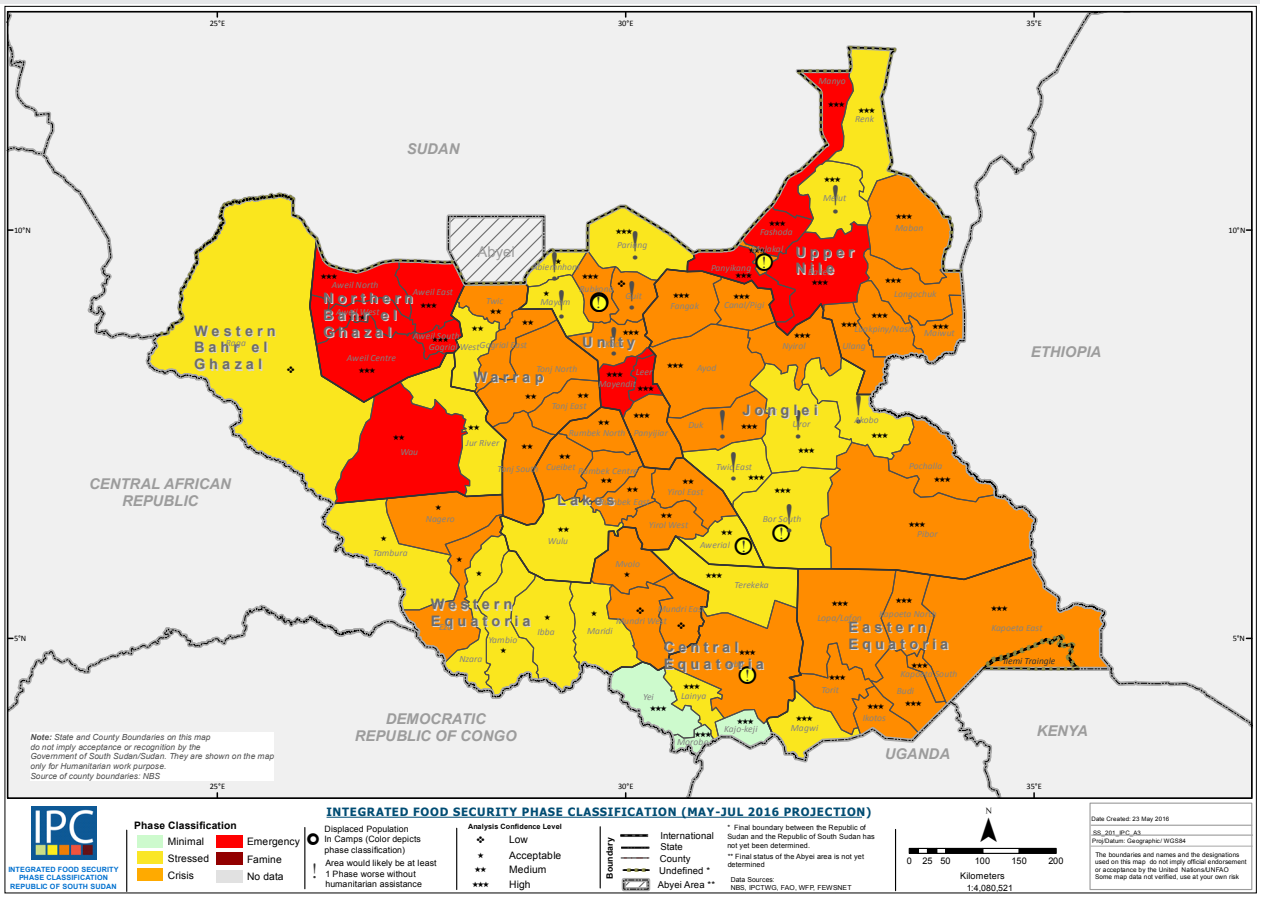
Observations and interviews conducted during the field research indicate that first, basic needs, such as food and water are essential for sustainable return, followed by long-term livelihood opportunities through access to land, jobs, education and markets. Therefore economic factors seem to play a particular strong role in the return process and context of South Sudan.

Access to food

In all three return locations, Aweil, Juba and Bor, returnees and hosts had poor access to food in the autumn of 2015, which limited their livelihood opportunities, showing that the sustainability level for returnees is not high at all. Juba, as the capital, does provide some more opportunities than others but

Map 3

Food security in South Sudan



due to the recent insecurity in Juba itself, these opportunities have also become less. It appears that therefore, in all locations and for all types of returnees, access to food appears to be the main challenge for sustainable return.

While food insecurity might not be considered necessarily a trigger of displacement, it can be a driver of it and thus, endanger sustainability of return, too, if defined as not being forced to migrate again. "Drivers" are less visible, but can also lead to displacement (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre & Norwegian Refugee Council, 2015). Cernea (2000), too, considers food insecurity as an impoverishment risk.

Despite the fact that the numbers of people that are classified as severely food insecure in South Sudan have shrunk overall, an estimated 2.8 million, that is 23 per cent of the population, still face extreme food insecurity. This is true for returnees and hosts alike. In the summer of 2016, the situation in the entire country got even worse. Some areas, like Northern Bahr Ghazal where Aweil is located, have moved from 'stressed' to 'crisis' classification (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2016a, 2016b). Northern Bahr Ghazal thus represents a case where return has not been sustainable and food insecurity has been a driver for renewed displacement and tension. During field research in Aweil in the autumn of 2015, it became apparent that returnees and host were severely food insecure. Those who returned from Khartoum after independence live side by side with stayees with different ethnicity, and their livelihood situation is similar to that of the local population. Many interviewees stated that they did not know how to make it to the next season. Many aid organizations had left as they assumed that the returnees had already reintegrated. According to their assessments, the situation of returnees did not differ much from that of the host population. The people in Aweil were left on their own because donors and aid agencies prioritized other areas. Not surprisingly, UNHCR states that since late January of 2016 over 69,000 people have been forced to migrate from South Sudan, particularly Northern Bahr Ghazal and Warrap states to Sudan for the search of better food security. Yet, food insecurity forced South Sudanese not only to emigrate to Khartoum but also to Uganda (Golla, 2016).

In Bor, food security and the sustainability of reintegration does not seem promising either. As observed in autumn 2015, returnees only received food aid for two weeks, which did not help them in their efforts to become self-sufficient, especially as most of the returnees came without any assets. Late rains in Jonglei delayed planting of sorghum and other seeds even more (Sudan Tribune, 07-06-2016).

Food insecurity has not only been a reason for renewed displacement in South Sudan but can also hinder displaced people in their return as observed during the field research. Returnees in Bor move between food distribution locations in Mingkaman as food distribution is not sufficient in Bor. The *REACH return intention survey* (2015) also found out that besides security, food insecurity was the major factor for not returning.

Already in a previous study done by Ashkenazi et al. (2006) on return to four counties in South Sudan (Yei River, West Juba, Maridi and Mundri), the authors found that water and food insecurity were the main challenges to reintegration. The same has been observed by Pantuliano et al. (2007). Cernea (2000) considers food insecurity also as one of the impoverishment risks. The interviews conducted during field research underline these findings.

Food aid, consequently, is likely to play a significant role in the return and reintegration process as emphasized by Bailey & Harragin (2009). The problem, however, is that aid is "often too little, too late or entirely absent" (p. 2). It often is "too late" as returnees need to be registered to receive food aid while spontaneous returnees are not. Especially, before a peace agreement has been signed, returnees are rarely registered. The author observed this in Bor. In addition, three-months of aid that is normally given during assisted return are often insufficient as observed in Aweil. Food aid raises "fears of dependency" with aid organizations (Bailey & Harragin, 2009, p. 2), but because "it is too little and too unreliable" (Bailey & Harragin, 2009, p. 2), the fear is not warranted in South Sudan.

Access to land

Access to resources, such as land or livestock, is part of one crucial coping strategy when it comes to guaranteeing food security in South Sudan. As Ruben et al. (2009) also observed for 178 returnees of six different origin countries (Afghanistan, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Togo and Vietnam) successful economic re-embeddness "requires access to resources, opportunities and basic services to establish a self-sustained livelihood" (p. 915). These can be, as Pantuliano et al. (2007) writes, a) livestock and agriculture production, b) the sustainable use of natural resources, c) access to employment and d) establishment of small businesses. However, while livestock is a major income for South Sudanese, those that had cattle before the conflict have in the majority of cases lost it. The Protection Cluster South Sudan (2016), which coordinates the humanitarian protection activities for IDPs in South Sudan, thus fears that the frequency and intensity of cattle raids will also increase as people returning will reclaim their cattle that has been taken (p. 1).

The same is true for other property, such as fertile and accessible land. The author has observed conflicts around land between returnees and hosts in all three return locations, Aweil, Bor and Juba. These observations are corroborated by an independent impact evaluation of a UNHCR community-based reintegration programme in South Sudan. Also O´Hagan (2011, p. 23), points out that land occupation has been a problem. Ashkenazi et al. (2006, p. 11) underlines general competition over productive land between returnees and hosts. So, when returnees have no access to land, they cannot grow anything that would guarantee food security. In consequence, sustainable return is threatened. For this reason, Cernea (2000) sees landlessness also as an impoverishment risk. While he names landlessness and food security as two different risks, they can be directly interlinked: Access to land can help the returnee to secure food. Nevertheless, having land is not sufficient to guarantee sustainability.

Access to jobs

Besides access to land, access to jobs can help returnees to sustain their livelihood and, thus, to (re)integrate. Cernea (2000) points to joblessness as a further risk factor of impoverishment. Without a job, returnees cannot afford the high food prices (Enough Project, 2016). In addition, the general economy is collapsing (Golla, 2016) and government spending is still skewed towards the military and security (Enough Project, 2016; Paes, 2014) instead of economic development or education.

The few jobs that are available are not accessible to all as outlined above. Akau (2015) also emphasizes that the "patriarchal cultural attitudes of the older generations-most of them in key government positions" (p. 1) neglect the young people. This patronage system and kleptocracy existed before the conflict of 2013 and still exists today (see Waal, 2015) and reduces job opportunities for the youth and some ethnic groups that are marginalized, such as Shilluks. This can lead, and has led, to frustration among the youth and the excluded ethnic groups, returnees and hosts alike, which makes them more susceptible to mobilization. This system is the reason why many displaced persons do not return as they know that circumstances for them have not changed, and the same system is still in place (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 6). Not surprisingly, many youth groups have organized themselves and use violence to make them heard. But even student groups, for example at the University of Juba, that were newly formed to express their objections have encountered clashes with or intimidation by national security forces (Sudan Tribune, 13-06-2016).

And even those who have a job often do not get paid or their salary is not enough to sustain them and their family. Traditionally, one income-generating activity was not always enough to guarantee food security. Different seasons required different income-generating measures. Yet, despite the job shortage, some preferred some jobs, such as working for an international organization, over others as they believed that salaries were higher.

Access to education

Access to education and education itself is closely linked to that to jobs: Without (higher) education it is difficult to get the jobs that are available. While some returnees, mostly refugee returnees who had access to education in their exile had better job opportunities upon their return, many IDPs outside PoCs did not have that chance. But not all skills match with the requirements at the local market. Even trainings some aid organizations offered to some returnees could later not be used at their return location. A problem also observed in DDR programming (Breitung et al., 2016, p. 19). While Cernea (2000) did not include loss of educational opportunities as an impoverishment risk, it seems to be a major issue in the context of South Sudan. Koser & Kuschminder (2015, p. 55) describe that there is a significant relationship between education and reintegration for refugee returnees to Sudan and Ethiopia.

Access to markets

Besides education and linked to the accessibility of jobs to guarantee food security and establish livelihoods, is the access to markets and with it, the general infrastructure at the return location. In several statements made by interviewees the access to markets was mentioned as a main obstacle to generate an income which is a similar outcome as reported by Pantuliano et al. (2007) and Ashkenazi et al. (2006, p. 18).

In sum, the access to markets, jobs, education and land determine to a large extent the food security and livelihood situation of the returnees and, thus, also their level of reintegration and sustainability. Each of these factors can influence one another. The level of education, for instance, can determine the accessibility of jobs, and the access to markets can influence job opportunities. Therefore, one can put them under the umbrella of 'economic factors of reintegration and return.' It seems that in the context of South Sudan, economic reintegration is crucial to guaranteeing sustainability. Several other authors have stressed the importance of economic recovery, especially in "post-conflict" contexts (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom, 2008, p. 461), and economic reintegration is a key issue in the process of return (Rogge, 1994). Cernea (2000) also states, "settling displaced back on cultivable land or in income generating employment is the heart of the matter in reconstructing livelihoods" (p. 35).

Still, economic reintegration factors cannot be analyzed on their own. They are dependent on social networks and aid services provided.

Social networks: Family and ethnic ties

If returnees can neither rely on aid services provided by the local government nor by aid organizations, they are all the more reliant on social ties, such as family, relatives or ethnic group, especially in the early stages of return.[18] Most of the recent spontaneous returnees interviewed in Bor and Juba stated that they live on land or of food from relatives. The same is true for those with low salaries or none at all who could not sustain themselves on their own in view of the fact that most returnees return without any assets. Many who had any assets before used the little money they had for their return journey. Only very few could benefit from some seed capital that they had left. Those who were moving to a new location, often had no family ties at all, but, if they were lucky, could rely on support by ethnic kin members.

Social networks can define the way returnees mobilize resources (Koser & Kuschminder, 2015, p. 60; Ruben et al., 2009, p. 915) and, in consequence, also influence the livelihood opportunities of returnees and with it, their sustainability. As also Cassarino (2004) states: Social structures "increase the availability of resources and information" (p. 10). Therefore, economic reintegration cannot be separated from social aspects. Johnson et al. (2016, p. iii) also found out that many displaced persons in Jonglei use kinship networks to get accommodation and food. The author observed the same pattern with refugees during her field research. John (2010) defines reintegration as the process of "remixing" and "forging closer relations and cooperation in a society" (p. 181) and equalizes access to resources with reintegration (p. 179).

18 \ See section on ‚Water and food', pp. 16 ff

Still, as observed during the author's field research, having family ties at the return location does not automatically mean that returnees are better reintegrated or indeed get help from their relatives. While Koser & Kuschminder (2015) observe that "acceptance by family is an essential part of reintegration upon return" (p. 57) Lukunka (2013) describes for return in Burundi that the lack of acceptance by the host community hinders social integration and can have economic repercussions. It has already been shown above that the relationship with the host community plays an important role in the return and reintegration process. If hosts and returnees are not treated the same by aid organizations or if competition increases because of pressures on resources, tensions will be likely.

Furthermore, socially marginalized, displaced persons might not even return or will have more difficulty during reintegration. Unmarried pregnant women find it particularly difficult to be accepted by the host community in South Sudan upon return. In general, John (2010, p. 182) points out that if displaced persons believe that they will not be accepted by their return community, they will also be not compelled to return. Cernea (2000), therefore, also considers "social disarticulation" as an impoverishment risk. While he, however, includes reconciliation under social disarticulation, he does not explicitly address trauma-healing. Yet, because of decades of conflict and renewed violence, many South Sudanese experience psychological distress (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 8). While the level of psychological distress is hard to measure, and there is not sufficient experienced staff who could identify symptoms of trauma, findings of the field research indicate that many people generally no longer trust others because of what they had experienced themselves or had seen done to their relatives or friends. This can be a "destabilizing force" (Amnesty International, 2016, p. 9) to social relations. Moreover, Breitung et al. (2016) note that fighting within the SPLA erupted so easily in 2013 as the "SPLA was never reconciled" and "there has never been a nation-wide healing process by which these deep rifts could have been addressed" (p. 22).

Without trust between groups and additional trauma-healing, sharing of resources remains a difficulty.

Political exclusion

As explained above, in South Sudan, the accessibility to jobs, particularly in government, is often determined by power- and ethnic relations. Displaced persons who are politically marginalized are thus reluctant to return and often lack livelihood opportunities and, if they return, cannot reintegrate sustainably. This is corroborated by Pantuliano et al. (2007) who argue that successful reintegration of returnees depends on the ability to access and participate in local governance (p. 9). Kälin (2008) further emphasizes that, as IDPs have been a party to the conflict, their inclusion is necessary to resolve it and make return sustainable. If a group, such as the youth, is politically or socially excluded and their voices are not heard, as has been shown above, violent clashes with groups in power can evolve (see also International Organization for Migration, 2013, p. 44).

The peace deal of August 2015 was largely focused on finding a power-sharing relationship between Kiir and Machar, marginalizing others on the way (Young, 2015, p. 35-36). Therefore, recent violence and renewed displacement does not come as a surprise. Pendle (2016) emphasizes, too, that previous peace agreements "have [only] reshuffled power between a circle of [...] notorious elites" and "have little connection to the reality of the ever more complex struggles of South Sudanese".

While Cernea (2000) underlines social exclusion as an impoverishment risk, he does not include political exclusion. Yet, "voicelessness" and political exclusion seems to play a critical role in the context of South Sudan and, thus, voicelessness could also be considered a risk factor to sustainability there. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and the Norwegian Refugee Council (2015, p. 4) also consider political drivers to be the most common form of displacement.

The unilateral decision by President Kiir to create 28 states instead of the current 10 already shows that unilateral decisions can have effects on the return and reintegration of displaced persons, such as Nuer not wanting to return to Bor. If this decision is fully implemented, it will have further repercussions for returnees (Arensen, 2016, p. 66). That minority return

can be problematic has also been argued by Adelman & Barkan (2011). At the end of 2014, the government of South Sudan had already blocked the planned return of displaced persons in the PoCs in Bor and Wau to Akobo, Leer and Pagak, as they feared that that they would strengthen the opposition that operated in these areas.

While the peace deal of August 2015 explicitly states that the transitional government "from its inception shall address challenges of repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction of IDPs and returnees" and prohibits "acts of hostility, intimidation, violence or attacks" against displaced persons and returnees (Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, 2015), a concrete strategy of how to do this is lacking (Bohnet, 2016a, p. 134). Moreover, the political will of the top leaders and personal integrity (Waal, 2015) is missing, as it had before during previous return movements (Pantuliano et al., 2007, p. 9). According to the peace deal, a special reconstruction fund (SRF) is to be established that prepares a detailed action, but no plan is in sight.

While the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), which is the local government agency responsible for return and reintegration in South Sudan, is active on the local level, no efforts are being made on the central level to include the interests of different displaced groups. The peace process in South Sudan has generally been an elite process and the question remains of how sustainable the return of displaced persons can be if the political dimension is not addressed. While Adelman (2002) argues that refugee return does not need to be addressed in peace agreements (p. 273), he points out that the issue of return is not a marginal, but rather a "complicating factor, with many different dimensions, in the successful implementation of the peace agreement" (p. 296). While returnees might be reintegrated in one aspect, they might not be in another and, in consequence, are not fully reintegrated, especially not sustainably.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the two-and-a-half-months field research in the autumn of 2015 in South Sudan and Ethiopia indicate that return is not a simple, linear or necessarily durable solution for displaced persons; be it for refugees or internally displaced persons. It is rather a complex process with different patterns and dimensions. People may be at the halfway point in their return or move between displacement and return locations, which shows that neither displacement nor return have clear endings or beginnings. As the author's definition of return stipulates, return can also mean that displaced people move to a new location, which in turn means that return is also linked to local integration. Aid agencies have to adapt to these diverse return patterns by acting pro-actively and by being flexible in their programmes.

Moreover, for return to be durable, it needs to be sustainable. The paper aimed to investigate what sustainable return in the context of South Sudan entails and what challenges it faces. The results of individual in-depth interviews with displaced persons and host communities demonstrate that sustainable return besides individual factors, such as gender, age and ethnicity, largely depend on the economic, social and political context at the return location. While the field research observations can only provide a snapshot of the situation in the fall of 2015, some general conclusions can be drawn.

The degree of sustainable return at the three locations in South Sudan seems to depend on how well returnees can secure their livelihoods for themselves and their families and can reduce the risks of impoverishment put forward by Cernea (2000). How well they can secure their livelihoods depends particularly on the accessibility of resources at their return location. This includes mainly, but is not limited to, the access of food, land, jobs, markets and education. These different economic factors are interlinked: access to land or a job can influence the food security of a returnee. Overall, the access to these resources depends very much on the social network and political access a refugee has and the aid services received at the return location.

As resources overall are very scarce in South Sudan because of a collapsing economy, competition over resources are on the daily agenda. Because of that, crime rates have also risen dramatically. Unemployment is high and food insecurity is omnipresent. As returnees put more pressure on resources, and livelihood opportunities are few for most South Sudanese, they regularly engage in violence to defend the scarce resources between returnees and hosts, but also among returnees, as they did in the past, aided by the easy access to small arms, which also facilitates mobilization. Ethnic divisions and mistrust between groups further exacerbate these tensions.

The political will on the government level might be missing to foster political inclusion and guarantee equal access to resources and it does not look as if the situation were going to change soon. Yet international and national aid organizations as well as local government agencies will have to strive to act at least on the local level. As the current situation seems to be unfavourable to return, it will give aid agencies the opportunity to learn from the past and adapt aid assistance for future return movements.

To reduce the risk of renewed tensions between returnees and hosts, the author recommends aid organizations and local government agencies to

- include the host community in the (re)-integration process of returnees,
- include the young people, especially young men,
- promote livelihood opportunities and guarantee quality and diversification,
- be pro-active and start early development programmes,
- do not neglect the psychological dimension of reintegration.[19]

As described in this *Working Paper*, sustainable return is a long process with different components (economic, social, political and psychological). Achieving that return indeed becomes a durable solution the political will needs to be there to guarantee accessibility to all groups of returnees and hosts which currently however does not seem to be the case. In addition, donor structures of aid agencies

19 \ See also Recommendations, p. 6

have to become more flexible to develop community, rather than group-based long-term programmes that also take particular vulnerabilities of age and gender groups into account. Currently, the prospects of sustainable return to and within South Sudan appear to be grim and if local governments and aid agencies do not improve actions regarding livelihood opportunities quickly, people will be forced to migrate again. The recent outbreak of violence has already forced thousands of people to flee. South Sudan is back in turmoil, and the challenges to return seem higher than ever. If demilitarization will one day finally come about, it will also need to extend beyond Juba to most of the country (Mamdani, 2016).

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BICC	Bonn International Center for Conversion	BICC
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement	CPA
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	DRC
IDP	Internally displaced person	IDP
IOM	International Organization for Migration	IOM
NGO	Non-government organization	NGO
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council	NRC
OCHA	United Nations Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs	OCHA
PoCs	protection of civilian sites	PoCs
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission	RRC
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement	SPLM
SPLM -IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition	SPLM-IO
SSCC	South Sudan Council of Churches	SSCC
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency	UNHCR
WFP	World Food Programme	WFP

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